

Earthkeepers in action in Sunderland Primary Schools

Between Sept and November 2008 NEST in conjunction with the School of Educational Partnership and Enterprise [University of Cumbria] ran a TDA funded project that focussed on continuing professional development via G2795 (i) 'Global Issues in Primary Networks'.

The objectives were:

To engage schools and pupils in an outdoor based, life long learning experience related to global issues and sustainability.

To foster medium/long term CPD opportunities and support to encourage sustained and embedded professional and curriculum development.

To use 'Earthkeepers' three day experience as a basis for developing staff and pupil knowledge, understanding and awareness.

To use the 'Earthkeepers' as a basis for getting action based changes in life styles to assist the overall need for greater care and concern for the planet.

To use the 'Earthkeepers' as a stimulus for enhancing classroom practice in respect of interactive learning, oracy (speaking and listening) and talk for writing.

To foster effective follow-up in schools to an outdoor learning experience and to engage schools in cross-curricular developments of a sustainable nature.

To encourage networking within and across schools through communities of practice and common aims and concerns

To encourage innovation and creativity within each school from a shared and different experience in outdoor learning.

Consider a key part of the final report: "The impact on 235 pupils and teachers/support staff has been simply incredible both in the interim evaluation (pupil voice) and from the anecdotal evidence from the school staff and headteachers". Five schools – seven classes and 235 children took part in 7 three day Earthkeepers programmes including follow up in school.

Furthermore the final question posed by TDA was:

'Where it can be established, what has been the impact of the project on the learning of participants? Where possible, please also assess the impact of the project on participants'

colleagues, their schools and the children and young people they teach (providing specific examples where possible)'.

In answer to this the report states:

'From the initial pupil voice questionnaire (from all 205 pupils) is that the experience has been rated as consistently 'brilliant' (93% rating it 10 out of 10) and having a significant impact on their thinking and personal actions to become more careful and try to 'save the planet'. Less than 3% of the overall number of pupils had ever visited this [Rainton Meadows was the site used] local nature reserve; now 10% have returned to take family/carers/friends and over 50% have suggested they will visit in due course.).

Staff have indicated an 'incredible' level of engagement of pupils in the project and the school based work has assisted schools/teachers develop new ways of linking 'outdoor learning' with the main curriculum; with significant impact on writing and pupils knowledge and awareness of 'global issues' and their personal responsibility. Between December and February 2009 all pupils have to engage in a process of 'sharing' their knowledge and awareness with family/carers and/or friends to broaden the impact of their personal commitment to 'saving the planet'.

A specific element, to be further evaluated and investigated, appears to be a very significant and positive impact on the impact on the learning of SEN pupils and some boys who were under-achieving.

Headteachers have reported to the project team the high level of impact of the project on teachers' subject knowledge and awareness (a significant percentage of staff and Headteachers had never been to the local nature reserve or heard of 'Earth Education') and are indicating their desire to see this built into the Key Stage 2 curriculum as a core theme.

The NEST/Earth Education team have never before been enabled to lead a major project with more than one or two schools. John Cree (personal communication to JDP) believes that this collaborative venture across 5 schools is 'unique' in UK, certainly in Europe and possibly world-wide.'